

CLAIMS

1. An information retrieval/distribution system comprising:

an information retrieval request unit for requesting the retrieval of several kinds of information which are scattered on a network; and

a plurality of database management units for managing databases in which said several kinds of information are stored,

wherein each of said plurality of database management units has management information about the databases which are managed by each database management unit, and has management information about the databases which are managed by other database management units which can be connected to said each database management unit through said network; and

wherein when a retrieval criterion is input to said information retrieval request unit, one of said plurality of database management units, based on said management information in one database management unit, retrieves the information in the databases managed by said one database management unit, and requests any other database management unit managing the database in which the information related to said retrieval criterion is stored, to retrieve the information in the databases managed by said other database management unit, thereby distributing the information corresponding to said retrieval criterion to the information retrieval request source.

2. The information retrieval/distribution system as set forth in claim 1, wherein said one database management unit manages a plurality of databases and can register the kinds of said plurality of databases as management information and, when the information retrieval is requested by said information retrieval request source, said one database management unit retrieves said plurality of databases to collect the

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making category information which defines the categories of the databases managed by said one database management unit; and

5           designating a database management unit managing the database in the same category to exchange the information with said database management unit, based on said category information.

10          6.   The information retrieval/distribution system as set forth in claim 1, wherein said one database management unit has the functions of:

            designating retrieving items of the information in the databases managed by said one database management unit through the retrieving screen of said information retrieval request unit; and

15           requesting said other database management unit to retrieve the information in the databases managed by said other database management unit.

20          7.   The information retrieval/distribution system as set forth in claim 1, wherein said one database management unit has the function of requesting automatically said other database management unit managing the database in which the information related to said retrieval criterion is stored, to retrieve said information, in the case in which said one database management unit does not designate any retrieving item through the retrieving screen of said information retrieval request unit.

25          8.   The information retrieval/distribution system as set forth in claim 1, wherein said one database management unit has the functions of:

30           designating a category through the retrieving screen of said information retrieval request unit; and

35           connecting said one database management unit automatically to said other database management unit managing the database in said category to select said database in said category.

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9. The information retrieval/distribution system as set forth in claim 1, wherein said one database management unit has the functions of:

registering the retrieval information of  
said information retrieval request source;  
executing the same retrieval periodically,  
based on said retrieval information; and  
sending the result of the retrieval to  
said information retrieval request source.

10. A computer readable storage medium storing:

a means which retrieves the information in  
the databases managed by one of database management  
units, based on the management information in one  
database management unit, when a retrieval criterion is  
input to an information retrieval request unit for  
requesting the retrieval of several kinds of information  
which are scattered on a network; and

a means which requests any other database  
management unit which is able to be connected to said one  
database management unit through said network, to  
retrieve the information in the database in which the  
information related to said retrieval criterion is stored  
and which is managed by said other database management  
unit, based on the management information about the  
databases managed by said other database management unit.

11. A program for information  
retrieval/distribution allowing a computer, in order to  
retrieve information and distribute said information to  
the information retrieval request source, to operate as:

a means which retrieves the information in  
the databases managed by one of database management  
units, based on the management information in one  
database management unit, when a retrieval criterion is  
input to an information retrieval request unit for  
requesting the retrieval of several kinds of information  
which are scattered on a network; and

a means which requests any other database

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- management unit which can be connected to said one database management unit, through said network, to retrieve the information in the database in which the information related to said retrieval criterion is stored
- 5 and which is managed by said other database management unit, based on the management information about the databases which are managed by said other database management unit.

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